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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KAMPALA 001236

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TAGS: PHUM PREL PGOV UG SU

SUBJECT: NORTHERN UGANDA: CURRENT TRENDS IN PEACE PROCESS

Classified By: P/E Chief Kathleen FitzGibbon for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).).

¶1. (C) Summary: The Juba Peace Talks are on recess while the Government of Uganda and Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) undertake consultations with various stakeholders. The break has provided many observers and the Government of Uganda an opportunity to take stock of the process and potential scenarios for its outcome. End Summary.

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ASSESSING THE PROCESS  
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¶2. (C) The Government of Uganda is reviewing potential scenarios for the peace process. These include: the talks succeed and the LRA sign and implement a peace deal; the LRA signs an agreement but fails to implement it; and finally, the talks fail. The consensus of civilian and military officials is that the LRA may sign an agreement one year from now and fail to implement it if the process does not fail before then. Their analysis is based on the assumption that the LRA entered into and is using the peace process to regroup, rearm, resupply, and rebrand itself. More importantly, the Government also views external patrons, Khartoum and the Ugandan diaspora, as providing the necessary support to encourage the LRA not to give up. The Government's assessment of potential outcomes is shared by the International Criminal Court (ICC), major non-governmental and human rights organizations such as International Crisis Group and Human Rights Watch, and other diplomatic missions.

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TIME IS ON WHOSE SIDE  
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¶3. (C) Many close observers argue that the peace process has given the LRA the time and space it needed to: A) get its commanders together at Garamba under the guise of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CHA) (regroup); B) food and medical treatment for its combatants and non-combatants (resupply); C) a safehaven accessible for safe military resupply (rearm); and D) the opportunity to legitimize and "cleanse its image" for the international community (rebrand) at the peace table. The GOU believes that the LRA is being re-tooled by Khartoum to undermine the Government of Southern Sudan. Santa Okot, a member of the LRA's Juba delegation told us that the LRA believes it will take another year to conclude a peace agreement. That puts the process into July 2008, one year from elections in southern Sudan and three from the referendum on southern Sudan's independence called for in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement.

¶4. (C) However, time is also on the Government of Uganda's side. At the beginning of the process, northern Ugandans

living in squalid camps, wanted peace at any cost. At the time, the Government's position on justice issues coincided with public opinion in the north that traditional reconciliation mechanisms would be enough to end the war. The Government was unable to build enough confidence between the LRA leadership and Museveni to get a deal in late December. Since then, outside influences, most notably Khartoum and the diaspora, have hardened the LRA's stance and led to many delays in the process. The GOU wants to conclude a deal quickly. In the meantime, northern Ugandans continue to return to or near their homes. One year without an LRA attack in northern Uganda could be changing northern public opinion more in favor of justice. In August 2006, it was common to hear that peace was the most important priority, even over justice. Now, with one year of a peaceful situation on the ground, northerners appear to be thinking more about justice. The consultation process will further illuminate current trends. Another factor working in the Government's favor is growing economic opportunities in the north. With each growing season, internally-displaced persons are gaining more economic independence and are well-placed to stock Juba's markets, which are already dominated by Ugandan traders.

¶5. (C) These trends also mean that time is not on the side of northern politicians, primarily from the opposition. Their popularity is based upon being anti-government. With the movement of IDPs back to or near their homes, northern politicians will hear more and more about the needs for services from their constituents. For now, the northern elected leaders have been able to blame the central government for lack of services. In time, however, these same elected leaders will need to show that they stand for something, not just against Museveni. Many astute northern politicians understand this, which is why they continue to

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call for a U.S. Special Envoy on northern Uganda. They fear that changing trends will weaken their position in the north and view a national reconciliation conference to address the north's marginalization as an opportunity to extract concessions from Museveni. Without a national conference, it will become difficult to re-adjust changing trends in power.

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COMMENT  
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¶6. (C) Despite our continued misgivings about the importance of the agreements reached at the peace talks at Juba, the process has resulted in an improved security situation in northern Uganda, and for now, southern Sudan. However, we still do not see indications that LRA leaders Joseph Kony and Vincent Otti, have decided what their end game is. Without continued pressure, particularly military pressure, the LRA leaders are growing more and more comfortable at Garamba National Park, making alliances with other groups, and enjoying food and medical support provided by international donors. One journalist argues that the fact that the LRA is getting more comfortable could actually sow the seeds of its own disintegration as fighters become complacent and lose their edge. While this may be happening, we would prefer to see Kony and Otti persuaded to put an end to the conflict before the LRA transforms itself and commits fully to being used by external patrons in the region.

BROWNING